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'Just as a broad interwoven nexus of roots that sink deep into the earth supports a mighty tree, it is the consistent and painstaking actions of members to offer personal guidance at the grassroots level that hold up the Soka Gakkai.'

Shin'ichi Yamamoto continued with conviction at the young women's leaders meeting: "The Soka Gakkai is the most noble organization in our society, for it has sincerely embraced even those society has rejected, and has shown them the way to happiness. Any conscientious leader should see this and praise the Soka Gakkai for it.

"If we had imposed restrictions on our membership, accepting, for example, only those with high social standing, financial means, good health and other qualifications, we would never have been called an organization of the poor and the sick, and many problems could have been avoided.

"But that would mean that we would have abandoned the true spirit of religion, and of Buddhism in particular, which is to save those who are suffering."

Whenever members saw or heard a media report that a Soka Gakkai member had been involved in some incident, they did not know what to say to their friends and neighbors, and this frustrated them. By addressing this, Shin'ichi shed light on the essence of the issue. He always tried hard to keep himself abreast of what kinds of problems and opposition were troubling the members. Once he discovered what these issues were, he would immediately confront them head-on and clearly refute what needed refuting. In the war of words, such quick action is of utmost importance.

Shin'ichi went on: "I hope that all of you, the members of the young women's division, will do your best to personally meet with and encourage each member."

He was concerned that the activities of the young men's and young women's divisions were becoming too focused on organizing meetings and events, and that one-on-one encouragement was falling by the wayside.

At the foundation of Soka Gakkai activities are practice for oneself, which consists of doing gongyo and chanting daimoku, and practice for others, which means sharing the Daishonin's Buddhism with others and encouraging and guiding fellow members in faith. In one sense, introducing another person to Buddhism does not stop with that person joining the Soka Gakkai. Truly enabling others to practice means consistently guiding and encouraging them until they surpass oneself in ability.

Meetings are of course important, but in reality not everyone can attend them. There are usually at least twice as many members in a local organization as the number who regularly participate in any given discussion meeting. Only by personally visiting and encouraging each member in our area can we solidify our organization. This will lead to the Soka Gakkai's growth and development and in turn to the advancement of kosen-rufu. Soka Gakkai activities without personal guidance are like a masterpiece without the finishing touches.

Offering personal guidance is of course easier said than done. The Soka Gakkai is made up of all kinds of people. Some may refuse to meet or speak with other members, while

others perhaps joined as children along with their parents but do not consider themselves believers. We may even come across members highly critical of the Soka Gakkai. Others may be suffering so deeply from financial difficulties or illness that they are bereft of any hope for the future.

It is no easy task to visit the homes of such members, to try and make conversation, forge bonds of friendship, talk about the importance of faith, and teach them about gongyo and Buddhist principles. Doing so is far more challenging than talking with members we see at meetings or organizing various activities.

But it is these very efforts that enable us to polish ourselves. In striving to help others grow, we grow too. Furthermore, struggling in this way constitutes true Buddhist practice. Promoting activities together with those who regularly attend meetings is simple, but this in itself will not enable the Daishonin's Buddhism to spread. To concern ourselves only with such members would be comparable to the captain of a ship bound for a distant shore contenting himself with sailing around the harbor. Leaders must realize that the main stage of Soka Gakkai activities is not meetings themselves, but the hard work that takes place beyond the meetings.

The network of life-to-life bonds that is the Soka Gakkai was built through the efforts of individuals to visit and personally encourage their fellow members. Just as a broad interwoven nexus of roots that sink deep into the earth supports a mighty tree, it is the consistent and painstaking actions of members to offer personal guidance at the grassroots level that hold up the Soka Gakkai.

A person who does nothing but grandstand, who is cowardly and lazy, cannot carry out this difficult work, which requires tremendous courage and perseverance. On the other hand, those who personally talk to and encourage their friends and the people they meet are true emissaries and children of the Buddha; they are the real champions of faith.

Shin'ichi was certain that if the leaders of the youth division actively engaged in giving personal encouragement, the Soka Gakkai's future would be firmly and eternally established. He knew that just as a river grows fuller and wider as it flows to the sea, the Soka Gakkai would expand and produce an ever-growing number of talented individuals as the years passed. If the youth division leaders neglected this one crucial area, however, they would be severing with their own hands the roots of the mighty tree of the Soka Gakkai.

That was why Shin'ichi emphasized the importance of offering personal guidance when he spoke at the young women's division leaders meeting.

Daisaku Ikeda appears in the
novel as Shin'ichi Yamamoto.
The events take place in 1963.